

All's Well

by LJC

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Summary: Alternate ending to Call of the Wild, part 2

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> an alternate "Call of the Wild, part 2"

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> Author's Note

> In April, 1994 I fell in love. I caught about a third of a quirky movie of the week
 about the unlikely partnership of a squeaky clean Canadian Mountie and a

> cynical Chicago Cop. When I heard this pilot was being made into a fish-out-of-
 water adventure series for the Fall, I was practically bouncing off walls. I found

> someone with a copy of the pilot film almost a week after the series premiere,
 and I was hooked from day one.

> Due South showed such a light touch, blending magical realism with comedy,
 drama, and adventure. At its heart was the friendship between Ben and Ray,

> who tempered one another, balanced each other out. Ray, a cop assigned to
 Violent Crimes who saw the very worst side of his fellow men every day. beaten

> down by his job, Ray wore his cynicism like a badge of honour, and taught
 Fraser the survival skills necessary for day to day life in Chicago. He gave the

> lonely young man a touchstone in a strange and terrifying place, and was his
 only anchor. Ben, for his part, tried to teach Ray that not everyone is pushing an

> angle, feeding him a line-Fraser took people at face value, believed in complete
 honesty and forthrightness, and helped pull down the protective walls of cynicism

> that kept Ray from living his life to the fullest. They drove each other nuts. But
 that was part of the fun.

> That fall, I started rounding up and printing out the Usenet

newsgroups
 feedback on the series, and every fortnight mailed a great thick 9x12" envelope
> up to the production office in Toronto for Paul Haggis and David Shore. The
 nicest-and only-letter I ever received from an executive producer came in the
> mail mid-way through November. I still have that letter.
 In mid-December, having already created and successfully run a Lois & Clark
> mailing list, I decided to try my hand at a Due South discussion list on the
 internet, and it was through that list that I made some remarkable friendships, not
> just with fellow North Americans, but fans from the UK and Australia, Europe,
 South America and the Pacific Rim, as the series was broadcast in dozens of
> countries world-wide.
 And of course, Due South was a hit everywhere but the United States. Having
> a very promising start-it was CBS' highest rated new series of 1994-it soon
 began to fall in the ratings as it was pre-empted mercilessly, its advertising
> budget cut, and the network did everything in its power, it seemed at the time, to
 kill it. Apparently the programme had been the pet project of one suit who had
> been replaced by another suit who felt the best way to make his mark would be
 to annihilate his predecessor's favourites. The first season was already in
> trouble, CBS having waited until the last possible moment to place an order for
 the fall, and the series would come slamming up against deadlines week-after-
> week as they struggled to get the shows in the can and out of post sometimes
 with only hours to spare before it was unlinked. First series was an uphill battle
> that by that spring seemed destined to fail.
 But the vocal core following of the show fought back. The Internet fans
> organised write-in campaigns, enlisted the aid of newspaper television critics all
 over the United States, finagled and fought and wrote and wrote and wrote, and
> still the series was cancelled.
 But CTV wouldn't let it die. Hell, it seemed like all of Canada simple came to a
> halt every Thursday evening for the hour Due South was on. It swept first one,
 and then two Gemini Awards. And miracle of miracles, CTV and its partners
> scraped together enough money to order a second season, with the hope that
 once the show was produced, they would be able to find an American airing
> partner. The week that second series premiered in Canada, there were Due
 South parties-supplied with goodies from the production office-all over the U.S as
> groups of fans gathered around a VCR with tapes messengered down from the
 Great White North.
> Eventually, once again waiting until the last possible second, CBS ordered a
 full season for second series. And once again, the show was given almost no
> publicity, put in a lousy timeslot, and once again the fans rallied to save it. But
 this time it was cancelled, and stayed cancelled.
> Or so we thought. This was the show that couldn't die. It was a huge hit in the
 UK, and this time the BBC worked with CTV to bring the show back, this time as
> Polygram's first television offering. The show returned in the September of 1997
 in first run syndication in the U.S., with

Canada and the rest of the world getting
> the third series in two 13 episode lots. Paul Gross had replaced Paul Haggis as
 executive producer, and David Marciano had not been able to return.
> So third series faced a unique challenge. How to take a series built on a very
 special friendship, and continue without one half of that friendship. Fans were
> sceptical, and many did not return, not able to picture Due South without Ray
 Vecchio. But among those who stayed, many (myself included) fell in love with
> the obscenely talented Callum Keith Rennie.
 No one could ever replace Ray-and Stan Kowalski was conceived with that in
> mind. And if we had to lose David Marciano, thank god for Rennie, because very
 few actors could have stepped into a show two thirds of the way through and
> done the job he did. This was a different dynamic, a different series. And while
 very few things could come close to the magic of a "Victoria's Secret" or "The
> Deal", third season offered episodes like "Bounty Hunter" and "The Ladies Man"
 that fit with the tone and feel of the earlier seasons. And out of love and loyalty,
> many fans were able to overlook some of the more disconcerting changes
 wrought by third series.
> And when "Call of the Wild, part 1" aired, it was like a fan's dream. Fraser and
 Vecchio together again, and the scenes between Gross, Marciano and Rennie
> were amazing, well crafted, and if not perfect then damn close. I walked on
 clouds for seven days.
> That is, until "Call of the Wild, part 2."
 Now, I know-at least based on what I've seen thus far from the online reaction
> to the series finale-that there are people out there who loved the way the series
 ended. I, however, clicked off the television, and took a deep breath and realised
> I was upset. I was beyond upset-I was appalled. As far as I was concerned, Paul
 Gross' script showed an incredible contempt for both the characters and the
> fans.
 This was a sick, sad, pathetic parody of the show I fell in love with-the series I
> organised a mailing list for, wrote one of my first web pages about, fought hard to
 save not once, but twice. A show I counted as some of the finest and most
> entertaining hours of television I had ever seen. A show that deftly went from
 quirky comedy to soul-wrenching drama with ease, that was clever and wise and
> funny.
 The plot had holes you could rive a Mack truck through. The Chicago regulars
> were wasted. The charming elements of whimsy were replaced by broad parody
 and we were expected to accept the blatant lack of a coherent plot, simply
> because that lack of plot was referred to in dialogue and therefore supposed to
 be some kind of magical realism?
> I had never missed Paul Haggis-who had a talent and gift for plots so tight
 they squeaked, who took a mediocre premise and turned it into a surprisingly
> touching friendship-more than I did that Tuesday night. If this was how Paul
 Gross views the series and these characters, then I for one am glad the show is
> not coming back next year.
 What did I want? I wanted a happy ending, with Ben back up North where he
> belongs, both rays back in Chicago where they belong-maybe even

partnered
 up... Kowalski with Stella, since I had assumed that was what earlier Stella/Ray

> episodes had been building towards... Frannie maybe settling down with a
 decent guy and having a successful relationship...

Closure.

> What I got instead was a joke that made idiots of the characters I love, and
 made me feel like an idiot for caring.

> And if I sound bitter, that's because I am I expected much, much better-
 especially in the script department. A series finale deserves a decent script, and I

> could have handled it if the show was mediocre-but why did it have to be
 downright bad?

> I don't expect all that many people to agree with me. But that night I sat down
 with my similarly dismayed roommates, and we decided we had to do something.

> So we fixed it. This can't change what happened, but this story is my attempt
 to leave what few good part there were of the episode intact, and offer the kind

> of series finale I had so desperately been hoping for and looking forward to. And
 I know that can come across as vaguely pathetic, but I'm quite past caring,

> really. Because this series brought me a tremendous amount of joy for the years
 it was on, and I couldn't bear to see it end with what I saw as such a sham.

> Whether you agree with me or not, I hope the story can stand on its own two
 feet; you can draw your own conclusions.

>
 Tara O'Shea

> Chicago
 May, 1998

>

> All's Well

> CONSTABLE BENTON FRASER and Ray Kowalski practically fell inside the door
 of the cargo plane as it continued to climb into the sky above Chicago's Meigs

> Field. Fraser slammed the door shut, and Ray grinned as the adrenaline
 continued to rush through his veins, his heart pounding in his ears.

> "Not bad, Fraser, not-" Ray's grin faded as he heard the unmistakable sound
 of four thugs cocking their guns, and Holloway Muldoon burst out of the cockpit.

> "-good. Not good at all," he finished, and they were jerked around, their hands
 bound behind them.

> "Benton Fraser, you're gettin' to be damn near as irritating as your father
 was," Muldoon observed, but Fraser only glared at the man who had been his

> father's trusted friend-the man who had murdered his mother in cold blood when
 Fraser himself had been a boy of six years old-his jaw set and blue eyes burning.

> Muldoon's lip curled in contempt. "Throw them out when we're over the ice
 fields," he told one moustached henchman, who nodded. "They'll be lost

> forever."
 "Ice fields?" Kowalski was confused. "What the hell is an ice field?"

> "It's a field of ice," Fraser stated the obvious.
 "The yank tends to miss the obvious, doesn't he?" the apparition of Robert

> Fraser sighed.
 "Sometimes," Ben conceded the point, earning a confused look from his

> partner.
 "Sometimes, well what is it the rest of the time?"

> "Well, it would still be a field of ice," Fraser covered awkwardly.
 "Both of you just shut up," growled Moustache Guy.

> And with the butts of the gunrunners' .38s came darkness. And with

the
 darkness came dreams...

>
 And life continues.

> Detectives Jack Huey and Thomas Dewey realised their dream of The One-
 Liner, and their comedy club played to marginal houses for a long time...

> Constable Turnbull decided to run for public office, but his campaign got off to
 a rocky start when he was run over by his campaign bus...

> My old partner Ray Vecchio did indeed cough up a golden bullet and he and
 Stella moved to Florida where they opened up a bowling alley...

> Francesca Vecchio made the cover of LIFE magazine with a record 6
 immaculate conceptions, and she loved her babies as though they were her

> own...
 Lt. Welsh stayed behind his desk, because that was where he belonged...

> Inspector Thatcher transferred to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service,
 where she was instrumental in the destabilisation and overthrow of several world

> dictators...
 And as for Ray, or should I say, Stanley Kowalski, Sergeant Frobisher geared

> us up with tack and tallow, and led by Diefenbaker, we set off, Ray and I.
 We set off on an adventure...

> And when we looked below, he saluted. Sgt. Frobisher saluted, and I saluted
 back....

> And off we went, to find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort sea.
 And if we do find his hand-the reaching out one-we'll let you know...

>
 AWARENESS CAME FLOODING back to Stanley Raymond Kowalski, the cold

> metal fuselage humming beneath his cheek. The world was pain and noise that
 resolved itself slowly into a head that felt like a cracked egg and the roar of the

> plane's engines. He opened his eyes a crack, squinting from the brittle light of
 snowglare.

> "Fraser..."
 "Quiet Ray," Fraser whispered so softly Ray could barely hear him, and jerked

> his head in the direction of two thugs in the opposite end of the cargo area,
 passing cigarettes and matches back and forth. The mountie twisted so that Ray

> could see the cord binding Fraser's wrists-cord that was frayed to the point of
 snapping. As it finally gave, Kowalski nodded, turning so Fraser could

> surreptitiously untie his hands as well.
 "How long...?"

> "I believe we crossed the border a few minutes ago."
 "Hey, ah... while we were out-you didn't dream anything, you know, weird, did

> you?" Kowalski whispered in return.
 "If you mean by 'weird' did my unconscious fears and desire for revenge craft

> a vivid hallucination during which we jumped out of the plane in mid-air, scaled a
 mountain in a day, rendezvoused with the one of the Bolt Brothers evil twins who

> was the mysterious buyer receiving a stolen Russian nuclear submarine from
 Muldoon-only to be saved from certain death by men on snowmobiles wielding

> automatic weapons by sky-diving mounties?"
 "Yeah. That would count as 'weird.'"

> "Ah. Then, yes. You?"
 "Me? Nah." Ray scratched his nose, shaking his head. "No. Maybe. You

> didn't go to fourth grade with Grizzly Adams, did you?"
 "I

don't believe so, Ray."

> "Good. Good."
 "Gentlemen-" Fraser leaned forward so that he was no longer obscured from

> the gunrunners' view by a large crate, still holding his hands behind him as he
 and Kowalski lurched to their feet. "Would you mind throwing down-"

> "-your weapons of mass destruction-"
 "Ray, please."

> "Sorry, I thought it had a nice ring," Kowalski shrugged.
 "-and surrendering yourselves to my partner and myself?"

> The two armed thugs exchanged looks, and one actually laughed.
 "No, see, what my partner meant to say-" Kowalski leaned closer to

> Moustached Guy, conspiratorially, and then glanced back at the mountie.
 "Fraser?"

> Fraser likewise took a step closer in, and then on cue, both men slammed
 their fists into the jaws of the surprised henchmen, who dropped like felled trees.

> Fraser glanced down at his bruised knuckles, while Kowalski shook his own
 hand, wincing.

> "Damn, that hurts. Why the hell do I do that?"
 They waited for the cabin door to be flung open, and prepared to face the

> remaining gunrunners, but the sound of the scuffle had been obscured by the
 noise of the engines, and the plane continued its smooth flight north into the

> snow-covered Northwest territories. Fraser and Kowalski dragged the
 unconscious henchmen to the rear of the plane.

> "Two down, three to go, son," Bob Fraser reminded his son, obviously itching
 to get to the business of Muldoon. Fraser ignored him, tying sailor's knots in the

> very same nylon cord they had been bound with. There was no way these guys
 were going to get out of their bonds as easily as Fraser had.

> Ray stood back and surveyed their handiwork while Fraser collected their
 guns.

> "Okay, gimme a gun." Kowalski held out his hand.
 "I can't do that, Ray." Fraser looked shocked that Ray would even suggest

> such a thing.
 "C'mon, there are bad guys-gimme a gun."

> "We're flying over the Northwest territories, and you're not licensed to carry a
 firearm in Canada."

> "Fraser, gimme my gun."
 "No."

> "Fraser!"
 "I'm sorry Ray, but I've sworn to uphold the law."

> "The only thing you're going to be upholding is a broken jaw if you don't give
 me a damn gun!"

> Kowalski eyes went wide as Fraser opened the cargo door and flung the guns
 out. The wind screamed, and an alarm light came on above the door. Kowalski

> scowled, and then he and Fraser stationed themselves on either side of the
 cockpit door as the two remaining gun-wielding henchmen burst through the door

> only to be met by their fists. Kowalski slammed one of the henchmen's head
 backwards into the wall of the cabin, while Fraser simply applied pressure to the

> nerve at the juncture of the man's neck and shoulder and he dropped like a
 stone.

> That left Muldoon and his co-pilot.
 This time Kowalski scrambled to grab the guns, and Fraser glared at him, lips

> pursed. Grinning, Kowalski handed him one of the firearms, but held the other
 out of his reach. "So arrest me later."

> Drawing their weapons, they slipped into the cockpit.
 "What the

hell is going on back there?" Muldoon called over his shoulder, and

> then froze as he heard the unmistakable sound of a hammer cocking back, and
 felt the cold kiss of a muzzle pressed to his temple. He glanced up and smiled at

> what he saw.
 "You won't shoot me, Benton."

> "You don't know that," Fraser said softly.
 Kowalski-his own gun pressed to the neck of Muldoon's co-pilot-glanced at

> Fraser in surprise.
 Muldoon laughed. "Of course I do! You're a goddam mountie-they don't kill in

> cold blood. And it would be-we both know that. You've got to bring me in alive."
 "My father didn't think so."

> "No. I pushed him too far. And you know what? He should have finished the
 job," Muldoon ground out between clenched teeth before he threw all his weight

> forward on the throttle of the aircraft.
 Kowalski slammed into Fraser as the plane dove straight for the frozen tundra

> below, white filling his entire field of vision as the ground rushed to meet them.

>
 "RAY. RAY? RAY!" FRASER patted Kowalski's cheek lightly, and then more

> forcefully. "Ray!"
 "I don't wanna go to school-ow. Ow, ow, ow." Kowalski forced his eyes open,

> and Fraser came into focus slowly-he had exchanged his please-shoot-me red
 mountie jacket for a parka and had what Kowalski realised must be snowshoes

> strapped to his feet. Not the rattan tennis-racket type that Kowalski always
 pictured when he thought of snowshoes, but weird contraptions of black nylon

> stretched over an ultra-light magnesium frames. Nanook of the North had
 apparently embraced the 20th century.

> "Are you all right?" Fraser asked, looking concerned, and Kowalski rubbed
 the back of his head.

> "No. Ow. Yeah. Jeez, I'm gonna be concussed. You?"
 "The co-pilot's dead," Fraser said, ignoring Ray's query, and Ray shivered as

> he caught sight of a parka-covered body in the cargo bay.
 "Muldoon?"

> "Gone," Fraser's eyes were like ice as he removed the ammunition clip from
 his stolen sidearm, checked it, and then clicked it back into place, chambering

> the first round before he thrust the gun into the pocket of his parka. "Head first, I
 should imagine." Fraser gestured to the packed and trampled snow beyond,

> littered with sparkling diamonds of shattered safety glass.
 "Jeez. Think he's still alive?"

> "He could have merely sustained scratches from his trip through the plane's
 windshield. The snowdrifts that cover the ice field are bottomless-they cushioned

> the plane's landing like a giant feather mattress. That was the only reason we
 aren't all dead."

> "Jeez. Where are we?"
 "Just east of Diamond Point. I read the co-ordinates off the instrument panel

> just before we crashed. Really Ray, you would have too, if you'd been just a little
 more observant."

> "Yeah, well, I was too busy seeing my life flash before my eyes, on account of
 the plane crashing."

> "Oh. Yes, I suppose the experience of crashing a plane piloted by a
 dangerous criminal in the Northwest territories becomes less novel when

> repeated. My apologies."
 "What? How is this like a book?"
> "Novel as in 'new'."
 "You mean you've done this before? No, wait. Don't answer that. I don't
> wanna know. So, we leave these jokers wrapped up like a Christmas present
 and find Muldoon-"
> "No. You stay here and radio Frobisher and let them know where we are. I'm
 going after Muldoon."
> "Hold it right there, partner-"
> "Ray, I have no doubts that in your native Chicago your tracking skills are
> more than adequate-but this is my home. I've done this before."
 "I don't like you going out there with no backup." Ray glared at him and they
> both knew that this wasn't really about backup.
 Fraser put a hand on Ray's shoulder. "Someone needs to radio for back-up,
> and make sure these criminals are taken into custody."
 Ray glared, but nodded.
> Fraser tried to smile, but his heart wasn't really in it. "I'll be back. With
 Muldoon. We always get our man, right?"
> "Right. Okay. Ah, jeez... what do you say when you crash an airplane?"
 "I'm sorry?"
> "You know, that thing-that thing you say when you're in a plane crash. Not
 S.O.S., the other one."
> "I believe it's 'mayday', Ray."
 "Mayday. Gotcha. I knew it was something like that."
> Fraser gave Ray one last backward glance before he stepped through the
 gaping hole in the fuselage out into the Yukon.
> Ray watched him until he disappeared in the snow filled distance, and then
 reached for the radio.
> "Mayday, mayday. This is Ray... Damn. This is Stan Kowalski of the Chicago
 PD calling anybody-if there are any mounties out here, I've got suspects here
> that need to be taken into custody. There sure had better be, 'cause hey, it's real
 cold out here. Mayday, mayday..."
>

> SNOW CRUNCHED BENEATH Ben Fraser's showshoes as he set off on the
 trail of his mother's killer. Images came unbidden to him as the arctic wind stung
> his cheeks and snowflakes-like tiny pinpricks-caught in his eyelashes, obscuring
 his vision. Ray lying on the ground, bleeding. His mother's gravestone, the tiny
> black and white photograph yellowed with age set into its base. His father's
 beard, all those years ago, peppered with grey. He kept his eyes on the
> Muldoon's deep footprints, rapidly growing more indistinct as the wind tugged at
 their outlines and drifted them over with fresh snow.
> He didn't have to follow the prints. He was following the blood.
 There wasn't much of it-a few drops every metre or so.

> But it was enough.
 "He's wounded."
> "I can see that, Dad."
 "Good."
> Fraser glanced up sharply, wondering-not for the first time-whether the need
 for revenge was truly his, and the image of Bob Fraser was simply a
> manifestation of his unconscious born out of his intense need to communicate
 with a father who had been absent nearly all of his childhood and adult life, or if
> he was just simply the victim of an old fashioned haunting.
 "Do you ever listen to yourself? To what you're actually saying?"
> "I know. I can't help myself," Bob snapped. "Muldoon is tearing at

me. I can't
 sleep or eat-

> "You can't eat or sleep because you're dead," Fraser pointed out,
 exasperated. Then his eyes widened. "You're fading. I can almost see through

> you," Ben observed-and indeed, the distant treeline could be seen through his
 now-transparent father.

> "It's nothing. A trick of the northern light," Bob dismissed his son's concerns,
 and then his pale blue eyes pleaded with him. "Find him."

> Fraser didn't have to answer. When he glanced up, Bob Fraser had
 disappeared, and he was alone with the howling wind. he trudged on through the

> drifts, following the trail of drops of rubies in the snow.

>
 "-STABLE-ULL-CIN-" A HISS emanated from the radio, and Kowalski leapt to his

> feet, pressing his ear to the speaker, his hands tucked underneath his armpits in
 an effort to keep warm.

> The henchmen were beginning to come around one by one with muffled
 groans and curses. Kowalski brandished his stolen gun and motioned for silence

> as he leaned closer to the cracked radio speaker.
 "Hey, can anyone hear me?" he spoke into the mic.

> "--oud--er-"
 Frustrated, Kowalski slammed his fist into the wall beside the panel, and his

> jaw dropped open as the radio sparked, and then the transmission began to
 come in clearly.

> "-stable Turnbull, Detective Kowalski. Do you read?"
 "Turnbull! I never thought I'd be so glad to hear your voice."

> "Is Constable Fraser with you?"
 "Nah, he's off doing that whole 'Bring 'em back alive' thing-unless of course

> Muldoon is dead, in which case, uh... he'll be doing that whole 'Bring 'em back a
 corpse,' thing instead. Hey, how far away from my co-ordinates are you?"

> "Not far at all, actually, sir."
 "Well, how far is not far?"

> "Look out your window, sir."
 Kowalski straightened up, squinting against the biting wind as he peered

> through the remains of the windshield out into the vast white tundra.
 As if on cue, the wind died down and dozens of brown-clad, fresh-scrubbed,

> newly-minted mounties appeared in the distance, circling the fuselage of the
 fallen plane on snowmobiles.

> "Wave, sir," Turnbull-obviously having spent far too long emulating Fraser,
 still wearing his red serge-suggested cheerfully, and Ray began to raise his hand

> before he realised how stupid that would look.
 "Turnbull, you yutz. Just get in here!"

> Diefenbaker, a ludicrous plaid scarf tied about his neck, trotted into the cabin,
 and seeing Fraser's red jacket carefully folded atop a wooden crate, whined

> plaintively. Ray buried his face in the wolf's soft fur-not, perhaps, the smartest
 move, considering said wolf had just spent hours running through the snow. But

> wet dog smell was the least of his worries. Dief "Yeah, I know buddy. I know." He
 looked up as a white-haired Mountie Sergeant approached, gesturing to two

> recruits to start carting away the bound gunrunners.
 "Buck Frobisher, son. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

> "Ray Vecc-I mean Ray-I mean Stan Kowalski, Chicago PD."
 "You

seem a bit confused, son."

> "Yeah. Hey-has anyone ever told you you look just like-"
 "Yul Brenner? All the time. So, where's Benton?"

> "Out there. With Muldoon."

>

> THE MINESHAFT WAS DEEP, that much Fraser could see. The sign was drifted
 over, only the top left corner visible. The boards had rotted through, and there

> was no question Muldoon had fallen straight through.
 Removing his snowshoes, Fraser retrieved the rope from his waist and looked

> about for something suitable to serve as an anchor. Once it was securely knotted
 about a tree, he began his descent into the shaft, the handgun a heavy weight in

> his pocket.
 There was only a light dusting of blown snow at the bottom of the shaft, and

> one pristine foot print. Fraser cautiously removed the weapon from its makeshift
 holster, and holding it at the ready, called out.

> "It's the end of the road, Muldoon."
 A shot rang out in the darkness, hitting the wall only scant inches from his

> shoulder. Fraser pressed himself up against the wall, out of Muldoon's line of
 sight, as he squinted, trying to determine the trajectory of the shot.

> "Looks like you picked up your dad's DNA for determination. You don't quit
 very easily."

> "I don't quit," Fraser called back, his voice controlled and hard.

"Ever."
 "I would consider that a character flaw, if I were you. Because, now I'm going

> to have to kill you. Just like I killed your mother."
 Fraser's finger twitched on the trigger of his gun, and he took a deep breath-

> when he was stopped by a voice.
 "You won't be doing any more killing."

> He could hear Muldoon's quick intake of breath in the small expanse of
 darkness between them. "Who said that?"

> Bob Fraser stepped out of the shadows into the shaft of light from above.
 "Remember back, twenty-nine years? Six mile canyon?"

> "Bob Fraser?" Muldoon limped out of the shadows, his forehead crusted with
 dried blood-bright against his waxy features gone even paler at the voice of his

> long-dead enemy. "Y-you were shot. You're dead."
 "So were you." He raised his arm, revealing an ancient .38 in his hand.

> "Ah no, this can't be real." Muldoon shook his head in disbelief, eyes darting
 between father and son.

> The shot was deafening-louder somehow than Muldoon's first shot had been.
 Muldoon flinched. Chips of ice and stone fell from the ceiling.

> "It's real enough."
 "How can he see you?" Ben asked, completely at a loss.

> "Because I want him to," his father's voice was low and angry, and he
 advanced on Muldoon. "You cross a mountie, he'll hunt you to the grave. He'll

> hunt you from beyond the grave."
 Bob pulled back the hammer on the gun, aiming for Muldoon's heart.

> "Dad, stop," Ben said softly. "This was wrong twnety-nine years ago, and it's
 wrong now."

> "Then what am I doing here, son?" he asked, his gaze never wavering from
 Muldoon's face.

> "I think you've been given a chance to try and get it right."

There was a long pause. The gun in Fraser Sr.'s hand began to shake.

> "Will you take him in?"
 "Oh, yes."

> Still staring at the shaken and confused Muldoon, Bob seemed poised on the
 edge of a decision. Anger, hurt and pain at the memory of his wife murder

> warred with his respect for the law, and his reluctance to take a man's life-even
 that of a foul murderer such as Holloway

Muldoon. But after a long moment, he

> slowly lowered the gun.
 "There is one thing I'd like to do."

> "And what would that be?" Muldoon asked, his tone a shadow of his earlier
 bravado.

> Robert Fraser hauled off and decked him.
 "I don't know why anyone ever does that. Lord, that hurts." He winced, flexing

> his abused fingers painfully, and then saw his son was staring, eyes wide.
 "What?"

> "You're fading."
 Bob smiled. "I've solved my last crime. I've caught my last man. No reason to

> hang around."
 "I-ah-I thought you were permanent," Ben said sheepishly.

> "Oh, son. Nothing's permanent."
 Then there was something...

Their eyes were drawn to the point in the

> darkness at the end of the cavern as a figure melted from the shadows, stepping
 into the pale rectangle of sunlight.

> "Caroline?" Bob's voice was barely above a whisper as the woman walked
 toward him, the light shining on her dark hair.

> "Mum?" Fraser breathed, and Caroline Fraser's eyes slipped from her
 husband's to her son's and widened, as if in astonishment. She smiled gently,

> reaching out to brush his hair back from his forehead gently, and suddenly Ben
 Fraser was six years old again. His eyes filled with tears, an incredibly sweet

> pain swelling inside his chest at her smile.
 Then she turned to her husband, and took his hand, and lead him toward the

> light. They paused, glancing back, and Fraser couldn't remember ever seeing his
 father so at peace as he was in that moment just before they walked into the

> light. A single tear slipped down his wind-chapped cheek, stinging, as he realised
 he was truly alone.

>

> "SO YOU JUST left him?" Thatcher's voice rose on the last two words to
 something akin to a roar, and Kowalski swore he heard mounties on the other

> side of the wall flinching.
 "Hey, I didn't leave him. He left me."

> "He could be lying out there, hurt, bleeding-even dying-"

"C'mon, this is Fraser we're talking about here. He's in his element. Besides,

> this was personal. This is the guy who killed his mom, for Christ's sake-like I
 could stop him?"

> "You're his partner, for God's sake-"
 "Yeah, well, tell him that."

> They glared at one another, their anger only thinly veiling their fears.
 "Inspector," Buck Frobisher spoke up from one of the straight backed wooden

> chairs around the mammoth fireplace that dominated one wall of the outpost,
 and both of them turned. "I have known Ben Fraser since he was a babe in

> arms, and I've seen him do things that even his father in his prime

couldn't-or
 had the common sense not to-do, and come out unscathed. I have my best men
> out there searching for him-but that fact of the matter is, all we can do is wait."
 That didn't sit too well with either of them, but Thatcher reluctantly gave up
> her pacing, and sank into an overstuffed armchair.
 "So, ah, how long you known him?" Kowalski asked after a moment.
> "Almost two years. I didn't believe Leann Brighton when she first described
 him to me. Nobody could be that... But then, my first day, he ran into a burning
> dry cleaners, risking his life over a mohair sweater. He made quite the
 impression."
> "Yeah, that sounds like him."
 "I thought he was mentally defective," she said wistfully.
> Kowalski chuckled. "You know, I thought he got dropped on his head a few
 too many times, ya know? When I first met him. I mean, Welsh told me-but I had
> no idea."
 Kowalski stared into the fire, his hands clasped loosely in front of him. "I ran
> away. That's what this whole thing started as-after my wife left me, I dunno-I just
 didn't want to be who I was anymore, I guess. I figured, hey, my life is shit,
> maybe if I was someone else for a while, I dunno..." he trailed off, and closed his
 eyes, sighing. "I got real used to having him around, these last few months.
> Yeah, he tastes dirt and keeps jumping outta windows, but that's what works for
 him, hey, who am I to judge?
> "It wasn't so bad, being Ray Vecchio. But now I gotta be Ray Kowalski again,
 and I don't know if I want to be him. Me. I can't go back to the way things were,
> but maybe... Maybe I have a better shot, now. A chance to do things right,
 instead of lousing things up the way I usually do. Sometimes..." he trailed off,
> rubbing the bridge of his nose and raking a hand through his spiky hair. "I miss
 my wife."
> Thatcher was saved from trying to make any kind of comment on the
 obviously deeply personal confession by a loud bang as the door was flung open
> and bounced off the opposite wall with a rattle as a snow-covered figure stepped
 inside. Kowalski, Thatcher and Frobisher simply stared as he crossed the floor in
> confident, even strides, his boots caked with mud and slush, leaving wet
 footprints across the wooden slats of the floor. Over his shoulder was slung an
> unconscious man, the hood of his parka obscuring his face.
 In silence, Frobisher, Thatcher and Kowalski followed the figure down the
> narrow hallway to the small lock-up, where a drunk Inuit slept off a night's revels
 in one cell, and dumped his burden on the camp cot in the empty second cell.
> The hood fell back, revealing a bruised and battered Holloway Muldoon, his
 hands bound behind him with nylon climbing rope, a nasty gash over one eye
> and what looked suspiciously like the beginnings of a shiner. His eyes fluttered
 open and he stared at the man who had brought him in with undisguised, killing
> hatred.
 "Holloway Muldoon, you are under arrest for the murder," Ben Fraser said
> softly, and then turned his back on him. Forever.

>
 "THEY MOVED HIM from Intensive Care this morning," Frannie

Vecchio's voice

> was rendered tinny by the long-distance connection, but there was no mistaking
 the relief in her tone. "He's sleeping now, but I could have one of the nurses--"

> "No. I just wanted..." Ben sighed, absently scratching behind Diefenbaker's
 ears as he cradled the phone between his ear and shoulder. "I just wanted to

> make sure he's going to be all right."
 "They've got him so doped up on pain killers, he thought I was our Aunt

> Constance from Jersey when I came to visit him this morning. Kept muttering
 stuff about my killer coffee cake. But the doctor's say he'll be fine. He could even

> be back at work by the end of the week, they said-it's kinda optimistic, you know,
 but if I know Ray, he'll be driving the nurses so crazy they'll release him in, like,

> two days just to get him outta their hair."
 Fraser smiled, easily picturing the scene. Unfortunately, it was one he had

> practice picturing. This was the third time Ray Vecchio lay in a hospital bed
 because of him, and this time, it would be the last.

> "Frannie, I--"
 "I know, Frase," she cut him off before he could finish. "Hey, I may not be the

> brightest, smartest girl in the world, but I'm not blind either."
 "Tell your brother--"

> "What, they don't have phones in Canada? You can tell him yourself, when
 he's up to it."

> "I... I suppose."
 "Yeah." He could hear the tears in her voice, "Anyway, I gotta go."

> "Good-bye, Francesca."
 "Bye, Frase."

> Kowalski watched from the doorway of Frobisher's cramped office as Fraser
 hang up the phone, rubbing his eyebrow with the side of his thumb absently as

> he stared off into space. Kowalski waited a sec and then strode into the office,
 sitting on the edge of the desk. Fraser looked up, blinking.

> "The guys we brought back rolled over on Muldoon pretty quick, even told us
 where to find the goods-The ATF already picked up the buyer on his way to the

> meet."
 "I know, I spoke to Lt. Welsh before I rang the hospital."

> "Vecchio, he okay?"
 "Just a flesh wound."

> "So, ah, when we get back to Chicago, I guess you'll partner up with Vecchio.
 That's okay, 'cause he's a good guy. You worked with him for a while."

> "You know, Ray, my father and Buck Frobisher were partners for more than
 20 years, and their territory was thousands of kilometres. Sometimes they

> wouldn't see each other for months. But no matter how far apart they were, they
 always knew that they were partners."

> Stan shook his head ruefully. "I'm not sure if you're--" the was going to say
 talking about me, or him when Meg Thatcher cleared her throat.

> "Constable?" She looked pointedly at Fraser, and Ray could take the hint.
 "I'll, ah..." Kowalski didn't bother to finish, but just smiled and offered Thatcher

> his seat, and then disappeared.
 She appeared to be chewing on something-a very big something, since she

> was normally quite direct-almost to the point of being brusque-with him. At least,
 she had been, until fairly recently. Her posture relaxed, and her brows drew

> together in a slight frown as he simply watched her, waiting for her to say what
 she had come to say.

> "I've been thinking about the matter of our transfer." She tore her eyes away
 from her subordinate's finely chiselled features, and let her gaze drift out over the

> vista presented by the bay window. Beyond the half-inch thick glass lay rolling
 snow-covered hills, the treeline a grey-green smudge along the horizon, the sky

> already darkening to pale indigo as the sun began its journey downward, and
 night approached. "You know, I look out at this cold, barren, empty landscape

> where any mistake could be your last, where you're surrounded by endless miles
 of silence with only yourself for company..."

> Fraser stared off into the distance, a faint smile on his face, a fact which did
 not escape Meg's attention.

> "...and I can't think of a life less appealing," she finished with brutal honesty.
 Fraser blinked, and stared down at his feet for a moment. Her tone softened,

> and she smiled gamely.
 "But obviously, it is where you belong."

> "Yes, sir. It is," Fraser replied.
 "So then this could be our-"

> "Possibly."
 "Then perhaps we should..." she leaned in closer, moistening her lips with the

> tip of her tongue unconsciously. "... say our good-byes?"
 She offered him her hand, and he shook it solemnly.

> "It has been a genuine pleasure serving with you, ma'am."
 "And, despite certain tendencies on your part for bizarre behaviour and

> unorthodox methods, it has been... a pleasure, constable." She extricated her
 hand from his, and tried to flee the room.

> "Meg," Ben said, and her eyes widened. She couldn't remember him ever
 calling her by name, not once in the last two years. She stopped, and heard as

> well as felt him come up behind her. He placed his hand on her shoulder, turning
 her to face him.

> Without words, he leaned forward and kissed her softly. It wasn't the same as
 that frenzied, soul-searching kiss atop a speeding train. It was tender, reverent,

> and somehow... final.
 "Good-bye, constable-Ben," she amended. He returned her wistful smile with

> a lopsided, tentative smile of his own. This time, he did not stop her from going
 through the door, returning instead to the window to watch the stars come out,

> one by one.

>
 "IS HE AROUND, here, by any chance? Your father, I mean." Buck Frobisher set

> a steaming cup of coffee in front of his best friend's son, but Ben didn't reach for
 it. His uniform was crisp, his boots shone, and not a hair was out of place. He

> looked a mess.
 "No." Fraser stared into the fire, smiling sadly. "No. You know he never told

> me, about my mother."
 "But what could he say? That he was a flawed individual? That he failed your

> mother, failed you? He was half-mad with grief, Ben. He did what he could. What
 he knew."

> "He became a murderer," Fraser pointed out, and Frobisher sighed.
 "Muldoon murdered the love of his life, and then laughed at him. Laughed in

> his face. Mustn't be too harsh on him, Ben."
 "I'm not. I can't

be."

> "Have you made a decision?"
 "Is it that obvious?"

> Frobisher smiled, and sipped his coffee to hide his smile.

"Whatever it is, I'm
 sure it'll be the right one."

>

> Ray Vecchio leaned heavily on one crutch, and adjusted his overcoat for the
 eighth time, trying to get the lines to fall cleanly with one arm in a sling and most

> of his upper torso bruised and wrapped tight as a roast. The doctors hadn't been
 happy about letting him out so soon, but he'd put up such a fuss that finally

> they'd been glad to discharge him, if only to get him out of their hair.
 The Air Canada flight began to disembark, and he searched the crowd for

> familiar faces.
 One familiar face in particular.

> Kowalski got off last. There was no one behind him. Vecchio could feel the
 knot in his stomach getting tighter, as the two men stood there, nervously

> regarding one another.
 "Where's Benny?"

> "He's home," Kowalski said softly, a muscle twitching in his jaw. He thrust his
 hands deep in his pockets, and watched relatives and friends hugging and

> chattering as the crowd at the gate dispersed, herded by friendly polite flight
 attendants toward the Baggage Claim. "You know, back up there with all the

> snow and ice fields and stuff like that. He, ah, wanted me to give you this though.
 You know, to say good bye." He handed Vecchio a small leather bound book,

> exactly the kind of journal Bob Fraser had kept all those years. But there was
 only one entry, and it was in Ben's handwriting.

>
 Dear Ray,

>
 I wish I could say good-bye in person, but the truth of the matter is, I know that if

> I came back to Chicago, I would never leave. And no matter how much Chicago
 has been home to me these last three years, I belong here. And I've been away

> too long.

> I've been alone most of my life-sometimes by choice, but most often by
 circumstance. I know I'm not exactly the easiest friend to have, but I have

> always-and will always-value your friendship. You are my best friend. And it
 doesn't matter how many kilometres are between us, or years.

>
 Look after Kowalski. This last year wasn't the same. But he's a fine man and a

> good police officer, and I think you two would suit one another.

> I still have two axes.

> Ben.

> P.S. See if the Bolt brothers have a cousin on their father's side named Cyrus.

> Vecchio closed the book, blinking rapidly to keep from misting up, and slipped it
 into his inside suit pocket. "So that's it."

> "Yeah. yeah, that looks like it, there."
 "You know... Huey and Dewey are leaving," he said conversationally.

> "No kidding?"
 "Yeah, they're gonna open up some comedy club out on the west side. So...

> we've got some room in the department. And Lou Welsh wanted me to ask you if
 you wanted to transfer from vice to violent crimes,

you know, permanently."
> "At the 27th."
 "Yeah."
> "With you." Kowalski gave Vecchio a long hard look.
 "Hey, I never said-"
> Kowalski grinned. "Well, who knows? My dad always used to say 'the future is
 where it's at.' Hip guy, my dad."
> "You talk to your dad a lot?"
 "Oh, yeah, all the time."
> "He still alive?"
 Kowalski looked at him askance. "Yeah." Then he put a hand on Vecchio's
> shoulder, a panicked look in his eye. "You don't-you don't do that tasting dirt
 stuff, do ya?"
> "Ah jeez! No! Jeez!" Ray said vehemently, looking disgusted, and Kowalski
 gave a sigh of relief.
> "Good. 'Cause I was worried... good."
 "Benny do that to you?"

> "All the time. All the time."
 "Yeah."
> "So where's Frannie?"
 "She knew. I didn't, but she knew. I dunno, I thought, maybe..."
> "Yeah." They lapsed into silence as they walked down the fluorescent-lit
 linoleum covered hallway of the terminal.
> "Hey, ah, you never met my ex-wife, didja?" Kowalski suddenly asked, and
 Vecchio gave him a mystified look.
> "No. You have an ex? Don't tell me-her name's 'Stella.' "
 "Never mind." Kowalski grinned suddenly.
> "Hey, what happened to my car?"
 "You know-that's a real funny story. I mean it. See, right after you, you know,
> left, we all thought Welsh had filled the mountie in on the whole switcheroo-
 thing...."
>
 Fin
>

End
file.